

Epilogue (*Sn.* 1128). Yet it is rather disappointing to see that *Th1* is silent about most of them. It has already been shown that Ajita at *Th1*, 20 is not the same as Ajita of *Sn.* Similarly, Puṇṇa (*Th1*, 70), Nanda (*Th1*, 157-158), Posiya (*Th1*, 34) nor any one of the three Tissas in *Th1*. (39, 97, 153-154) shows any connection with the men bearing similar names in *Sn.* It is also highly improbable that Bhaddali (*Th1*, 275-277) or Bhadda (*Th1*, 473-479) and Udāyī (*Th1*, 689-704) have any connection with Bhadrāvudha and Udaya. The degree of improbability is less in the case of Kappa of *Th1*, 567-576, though no direct evidence is forthcoming.

On the other hand, it is quite probable that Mogharāja of *Th1*, 207-208 is the same as Mogharāja in *Sn.* In fact he is the most frequently mentioned person out of all these sixteen *mānavas*. It has already been stated that he is mentioned twice in the *Apadāna* (I, 87, II, 486) and once in the *Theragāthā* (*Th1*, 207-208). *Samyutta*, I, 23 contains two stanzas, one by Mogharāja and the other the Buddha's reply, which are not found either in *Sn.* or *Th1*. It may have been quite probable that the original *Mogharājapucchā* was longer than what is now handed down in *Sn.* It is also probable that the *Samyutta* quotes from another recension of the *Mogharājapucchā* which is now lost. The quotation found at *Milp*, 412 of a saying by Mogharāja cannot be traced either in *Sn.* or *Th1*. It is probable that the source from which it was taken was known to the author of *Milp*. and was subsequently lost. The nature of these passages does not permit the inference that they belonged to another Mogharāja. This corroborates what has already been noticed in the case of the two *Apadāna* stories.

It is not proposed to give an analysis of the linguistic data. The few remarks made earlier show to some extent the antiquity of these poems. All the evidence from external sources points to the fact that Mogharāja was a prominent member of the community. The evidence from the *Samyutta* and *Milp*. does not help to establish the anteriority of the poem in *Sn.* to those respective works. It is quite probable that *Sn.* preserves only a fragment of a longer dialogue; and that the *Samyutta* and *Sn.* are complementary to each other in this respect.

(to be concluded)

## THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'TATHĀGATA'

According to the Pāli Commentaries: Text and Introductory Essay

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### Introduction

In the whole of Buddhist literature the epithets of the Buddha are probably as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, but among these many names and titles none cuts deeper or takes in more meaning than the word "Tathāgata". It is the epithet the Buddha uses with greatest frequency in reference to himself, a fact of no small importance. It is never employed by others as a direct address for the Buddha, and only rarely as a third-person designation, as though its use was a privilege reserved for the Master alone. The context in which the Buddha uses it further heightens its significance. When he speaks about himself as a particular individual with a private background of experience, the Buddha generally employs the first-person pronoun "I" (*aham*). But when, in contrast, he speaks about himself in his other, supra-individual role—as the discoverer and teacher of the path to deliverance—he drops this personal mode of speech and refers to himself instead indirectly as "the Tathāgata." The very appearance of the word in the *suttas* thus signals a shift in perspective: a momentary flash from the tight analytical principles composing the discourse to the vast spacey backdrop against which its exposition unfolds. We see this already at the outset of the Buddha's career. When the newly enlightened Master first approaches the five ascetics in the Deer Park at Benares, he begins his teaching mission by announcing: "The Tathāgata, monks, is a Holy One, a perfectly enlightened Buddha." And so it is, day in and day out, all the way through the remaining 45 years of his ministry, right down to the *Pari-nibbāna*. Whenever his self-reference draws him out from the web of particulars in which his life is set to reveal him in the full breadth and majesty of his stature, time and again the words come: "The Tathāgata, bhikkhus, . . . . ."

In recognition of its pre-eminence among the Master's epithets, the early Buddhist teachers and their successors have applied their wisdom and erudition to fathoming the multiple implications of this suggestive word. Their tradition of exegesis, transmitted and elaborated from one generation to the next, has reached its standard form in the detailed explanation set down by the great *ācariya*, Buddhaghosa Thera, in his polished editions of the ancient commentaries. In what follows we



present a translation from the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, the commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, of the standard scholastic exegesis of the word "Tathāgata." The same passage is reproduced verbatim in other commentaries to the Canon with the strict consistency typical of the Pāli tradition. When they were thought useful, further elucidations of this exposition in the sub-commentary (*ṭīkā*) of Ācariya Dhammapāla and the new sub-commentary (*abhinavaṭīkā*) of the Burmese elder Nāṇābhivamsa (early 19th c.) have been given. Even this analysis of the term, however, is not final, since subsequent teachers have attempted to discover in it still additional shades of meaning, but these lie beyond our present concern.

The commentary gives eight basic reasons why the Exalted One is called "Tathāgata." As a glance at these reasons will show, each seeks to relate this profound term to some core aspect of the theory or practice of the Dhamma. Such a procedure, though not strictly etymological, is all quite legitimate from the standpoint of inner realization taken by the teachers of old. Since from this higher, experiential standpoint the Buddha is apprehended not merely externally as a historical person, but in essence as the concrete embodiment of the Dhamma itself, it is only fitting that the ancient masters should see in his most preferred form of self-designation a compendium of the entire Doctrine and Discipline for which he stands. Thence the sub-commentary can say that "the word 'Tathāgata' contains the entire practice of the Dhamma as well as all the qualities of a Buddha."

How this is so a brief synopsis of each derivation to follow should make plain.

(i) The first, which divides the Pāli compound into *tathā āgata*, "thus come," points to the Buddha as the great arrival who appears in the world along the same primordial trail as his predecessors, the Buddhas of the past. The indeclinable *tathā* here indicates conformity to a pattern, the participle *āgata* the arrival at a goal. Together, the two show the advent of a Buddha to be, not a chance, unique phenomenon, but a regular outcome of the universal patterning of events. It is an occurrence which repeats itself, at rare intervals, ever and again across the vast ocean of cosmic time, making each Buddha simultaneously the heir to a double chain of succession: on the one hand, as the most recent member of the series of Buddhas extending back into the beginningless past; on the other as the last link in a single sequence of lives wherein he toiled to perfect all those qualities which issued in his great achievement. Both types of fulfilment, the individual and the universal, are implied by the term "Tathāgata." Since our present Buddha, the Sakyan Gotama,

arrived at his goal through the same course as his predecessors, the previous Buddhas, the word "Tathāgata," as the commentary explains, comprises the entire set of practices that go into the make-up of that ancient course: the great aspiration, the thirty *pāramīs*, the five relinquishments, the thirty-seven constituents of enlightenment, etc.

(ii) The second derivation, as *tathā gata*, "thus gone," is explicated in two ways. The first relates the traditional account of the bodhisattva's deportment at birth, explaining the symbolic significance of each element in the story. The second, like the derivation "thus come," draws upon the image of a journey. Only now the journey is viewed from the opposite perspective—not from the standpoint of arrival, but from the standpoint of departure. The focus here falls on the aspect of transcendence: the movement from the hither shore of peril, suffering, and death, to the further shore of the deathless, the realm of emancipation. Hence the commentary goes on to educe from the term "Tathāgata" the complete practice culminating in final deliverance: the abandoning of the five hindrances, the eight attainments of serenity meditation, the eighteen great insights, and the realization of the four supramundane paths, which sever all the fetters of existence and issue in deliverance from the round. Whereas the set of practices given in the first derivation is, in its completeness, peculiar to fully enlightened Buddhas alone, this present set, with minor variations, must be fulfilled by all who seek emancipation from *Samsāra*.

(iii) The third explanation, "come to the real characteristic," hinges upon both a tenet of philosophical understanding and a practice which transmutes that tenet into lived experience. The tenet holds that every real *dhamma*, i.e. every existent actuality, possesses a specific nature (*sabhāva*), characteristic mark (*lakkaṇa*), or formal essence (*sarūpa*), which provides its inner significance and the key to its comprehension. The earth element, for example, has the characteristic of hardness. Hardness is its nature or essence; hardness differentiates the earth element from other *dhammas*, so that the comprehension of the earth element is achieved by penetrating its significance as hardness. The same principle holds for all the other *dhammas*. Each has its own specific mark, which distinguishes it from every other *dhamma* and offers the inlet to its comprehension.

The practical application of this tenet lies in the fact that each of these characteristics can be experienced. It is, in fact, just through the experience of the characteristic that the *dhamma* can be known—seen in its bare actuality stripped of all subjective superimpositions. In the systematic development of wisdom, this phase of practice is called *ñātapariññā*,



full understanding of the known, or *nāmarūpa-vavatthāna*, the defining of mentality—materiality. It is the third stage along the path to purity known as *ditṭhivissuddhi*, purification of view, where the seemingly solid human organism is mentally dissected into its multiple components, and each component *dhmma* is defined and grasped by way of its characteristic, thereby exploding the illusion of a unitary self.

The discovery of this method of analysis, and of each characteristic of every real *dhmma*, was the work of the knowledge of the Buddha. Hence, in discovering these real characteristics, the Buddha is appropriately called “the Tathāgata.”

(iv) The next explanation, “awakened to real *dhmmas*,” takes us to the heart of the Buddha’s doctrine, the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination. Here the prefix *tathā* conveys the sense of reality, actuality, or truth, and the terminal *gata* the sense of knowledge. When fused into the compound “Tathāgata,” they signify the awakening to the real, most fundamental facts of sentient existence—to the truths of suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path to its end, as well as to the conditional arising of all phenomena of existence. The unknowing of these truths is ignorance, the root of delusion which drives beings through the round of birth and death. Their penetration is wisdom, the direct perception of things as they really are. Since it was the Buddha who first awakened to these truths, and who still awakens others to them through the medium of his Teaching, he gains the title “Tathāgata.”

“They are real, not unreal, not otherwise” (*tathā avitathā anaññathā*)—these three terms the Buddha uses to describe each truth, as also each link in the chain of conditionality, drive home their complete actuality. They are not in the Pāli texts, a mere introduction to his dispensation, as is too often thought, or a halfway house to some metaphysical absolute, as later Buddhist tradition was to hold, but the undistorted, undeceptive suchness (*tathatā*) itself. They are the actualities which must be seen, fathomed, and understood to bring the round of suffering to its final, momentumless halt.

(v) The next account, “a seer of the real,” discloses the Buddha’s knowledge of omniscience (*sabbāññutañāna*). He is a seer of all that is real—whatever can be seen, heard, sensed, or cognized by the mind. The quality of omniscience has sometimes been disputed by Pāli scholars as an attribute of the Buddha, on the grounds that the Buddha denies knowing everything simultaneously (see *Tevijja—Vacchagotta Sutta*, M. 71). But this denial of simultaneous all-knowledge does not bar out the possibility of another kind of omniscience, and the Buddha in fact says that

to quote him as denying the possibility of omniscience altogether is to misrepresent his Teaching, drawing an illegitimate deduction from what he has actually said (see *Kaṇṇakathala Sutta*, M. 90). According to the Theravāda tradition, the Buddha is all-knowing in that he can know whatever he wishes to know. The range of his faculty of knowledge coincides with the range of the cognizable. Whatever he adverts to enters immediately into the portal of his comprehension. This claim is supported by a number of *suttas*, such as the one cited here, which explains the Buddha’s omniscience in terms of his knowledge of the entire cognitive domain as seen, heard, sensed, and mentally cognized. The commentary goes on to elucidate each category by way of the Abhidhammic scheme of classification, thereby calling attention to the analytical precision of the Buddha’s knowledge as well as to its totalistic range. If the earlier explication in terms of the four truths reveals the depth and existential immediacy of the Dhamma, the present one reveals its breadth and impeccable perspicacity.

(vi) The rendering as “speaker of the real” hinges upon a slight mutation of the hard ‘t’ of *gata* into the soft ‘d’ of *gada*. *Gada* means speech or enunciation, so *tathāgada* becomes truthful speech or, by extension, one who makes truthful speech—a reference to the unerring veracity of every genuine utterance of the Master.

(vii) The seventh account, as “practising what he teaches,” expresses the perfect consistency between the conduct and teaching of the Buddha. He does not act in one way and teach his disciples to act otherwise. He does not inspire others with lofty principles while failing to fulfil them himself. Without need for self-justification or excuses, he practises what he teaches and teaches what he has practised. In his own person he provides the ideal exemplification of his Teaching, and he instructs others to emulate his example by rectifying their conduct in accordance with the Teaching.

(viii) The last rendition, as “surpassing” or “vanquishing,” springs from the purely fanciful etymology given in the commentary. Of greater value and interest is the following derivation, not separately enumerated, which relates the term “Tathāgata” to the four modes of penetrating the Four Noble Truths. Here the truth of suffering is equated with the world in its totality, for the deepest level of suffering or *dukkha* is found in the instability and essencelessness of the five clinging aggregates which comprise the world. The four penetrations are the *full understanding* of the nature of the world, by scrutinizing the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of the aggregates; the *abandoning* of the origin of the world, the craving which generates the repeated cycles of becoming; the



realization of the cessation of the world, the unconditioned element of Nibbāna where the aggregates cease; and the *development* of the way leading to the cessation of the world, the Noble Eightfold Path. Because these modes of penetration can each be redefined by a word expressing movement, and the word *gata* signifying movement can in turn acquire a meaning of knowledge,<sup>1</sup> the term "Tathāgata," "thus gone," suggests the penetration of the Four Noble Truths in the mode of penetration peculiar to each truth. In this way once again the word "Tathāgata" implies the entire theory and practice of the Dhamma.

These brief remarks should suffice to warn us not to expect, in the commentary to follow, an etymological account of the type sought for by Western scholarship. To take the commentarial method of exegesis as an attempt to give a scientific explanation of the origin of a word, and then accuse the commentators of poor etymology, is to ascribe to the ancients a procedure quite foreign to their purpose. The aim of the commentators, in giving such elaborate disquisitions on key doctrinal terms, is not to show the historical derivation of a word, but to elicit from the word the various implications it contains for the spheres of understanding and practice. The aim, in short, is not so much scientific as spiritual. The key words of the doctrine are taken up as themes for contemplation and reflection, each a potential stimulus to the growth of wisdom. When allowed to sink into a clear, calm, receptive consciousness, gradually they unfold their hidden wealth of meaning, leading to deeper levels of comprehension.

The results of these reflections have been preserved for us by the ancients in their commentarial expositions, for the most part based on vast erudition and profound spiritual experience. To be sure, they need not (and should not) be accepted blindly in their entirety. They should be critically examined and screened, and only what is thought to be valid and useful for spiritual progress retained. But their value has to be properly appraised. If one approaches them with the demands of scientific scholarship, disappointment is bound to follow, for their aim is not scientific. But if one approaches them in the right spirit, as aids to understanding, as guides to the inner significance of the Dhamma stimulating meditation and insight, then one will find a rich and rewarding field yielding an abundant harvest.

1. In Pāli, words deriving from the root */gam* = "to go, and words deriving from the root */budh* = "to understand", are often treated as interchangeable in meaning. *Yo hi gatyattho so buddhyattho, yo ca buddhyattho so gatyattho*: "words signifying movement convey the meaning of understanding, and words signifying understanding convey the meaning of movement" (*Abhinavaṭṭikā*).

Particularly is this the case with the word "Tathāgata," the chief epithet of the chief of men, the Buddha. That a perfectly enlightened being would single out a specific term for self-reference cannot be a matter of chance but of deliberate choice—a choice based on a keen awareness of all that the word implies. The content is already there in the word itself—"the entire practice of the Dhamma as well as all the qualities of a Buddha"—locked up in it like the energy locked up in the atom. It is for us to draw it out. To this end the ancient teachers have helped us with their detailed exposition, in its thoroughness, clarity, and restrained eloquence one of the finest products of the commentarial genius. But to arrive at a full comprehension of the term there is for us still work to be done. The exposition must first be studied, then subjected to careful consideration. This will kindle faith and lay the grounds for understanding. But to deepen the understanding the term "Tathāgata" should then be taken up as an object of meditation—a form of *Buddhānussati*, "the recollection of the Buddha," one of the forty traditional subjects of *samatha* meditation. As such it should first be examined in each of its several implications, run through by the mind over and over until the essential flavour of each meaning stands out. When the flavour becomes clear, gradually the verbal scaffolding should be removed. Only the essential flavour should be retained, held fast by the mind, and repeatedly developed, until gradually, in stages, the term yields up its inner core of signification to direct intuition free from discursive thought.

### Text

Note: All textual references are to the Burmese script *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* (Sixth Great Council) recension. The main body of the text is from the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* = Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, Vol. I, Silakkhandhavagga Aṭṭhakathā, pp. 59-67. Selections from the sub-commentary (*Tīkā*) are prefixed by *Sub. Cy.*, and from the new sub-commentary (*Abhinavaṭṭikā*) by *N. Sub. Cy.* Since the latter in good part simply reproduces the standard sub-commentary, expanded and elaborated for the sake of clarity, clarifying phrases from the newer work have sometimes merely been inserted into the translated selections from the old sub-commentary, marked off by square brackets.

The Exalted One is called "the Tathāgata" for eight reasons:

- (i) because he has "thus come" (*tathā āgato*);
- (ii) because he has "thus gone" (*tathā gato*);
- (iii) because he has come to the real characteristic (of *dhammas*) (*tathalakkhaṇam āgato*);



- (iv) because he has awakened to real *dhammas* in accordance with actuality (*tathadhamme yāthāvato abhisambuddho*);
- (v) because he is a seer of the real (*tathadassitāya*);
- (vi) because he is a speaker of the real (*tathavāditāya*);
- (vii) because he practises what he teaches (*tathakāritāya*);
- (viii) and in the sense of vanquishing or surpassing (*abhibhavanaṭṭhena*).

(i) Why is the Exalted One called the Tathāgata because he has “thus come”?

Because he has come in the same way that the previous perfectly enlightened Buddhas came, engaged in exertion for the welfare of the whole world—that is, the Exalted Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa.<sup>1</sup> What is meant? Our Exalted One (the Buddha Gotama) has come through the very same aspiration (*abhinīhāra*)<sup>2</sup> that these Exalted Ones came through. Or just as the Exalted Vipassī... the Exalted Kassapa came after they had fulfilled the full thirty *pāramīs*—i.e. the ten basic, ten intermediate, and ten ultimate *pāramīs* of giving, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity; made the five great relinquishings—i.e. the relinquishing of limbs, eyes, wealth, kingdom, and children and wife; fulfilled the preliminary effort, the preliminary conduct, the preaching of the Dhamma, conduct for the good of kinsmen, etc.; and reached the summit in conduct developing intelligence—exactly *thus* has our Exalted One come (*tathā amhākam pi Bhagavā āgato*). Or else, just as the Exalted Vipassī... Kassapa came by developing and cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right endeavours, the four bases of spiritual success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path—exactly *thus* has our Exalted One come. Thence he is the Tathāgata because he has “thus come.”

As Vipassī and the other great sages of the past  
Came to the state of omniscience in the world,  
In that very same way the Sakyan sage came.  
Thence he, the all-seeing, is called “Tathāgata.”

1. These are the six Buddhas mentioned in the most ancient canonical texts as the immediate predecessors of the Buddha Gotama. See *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, D. 14. Later canonical works mention twenty-seven preceding Buddhas, and trace the original aspiration of our present Buddha back to the twenty-fourth, the Buddha Dīpaṅkara. See esp. *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists: Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, III.

2. A technical term for the original aspiration made by a Buddha-aspirant at the feet of a living Buddha, appearing in later canonical works and the commentaries.

*Sub. Cy.* Though the five great relinquishings belong to the perfection of giving, they are mentioned separately in order to show that they are distinct forms of relinquishing, that they are extremely difficult to practice, [and that they are distinct requisites for enlightenment]. For the same reasons, the relinquishing of the eyes is mentioned separately from the relinquishing of the limbs. And though they all involve possessions, the relinquishing of children and wife is mentioned separately from the relinquishing of wealth and kingdom. The “preliminary effort” (*pubba-yoga*) is the achievement of the meditative attainments and the (five) *abhiññas*,<sup>1</sup> together with the preliminary portion of practice for these consisting in the duties of advancing and retreating (to and from the village for alms). The “preliminary conduct” (*pubbacariyā*) is the achievement of extraordinary practice in giving, etc., included in the *Cariyāpiṭaka*.<sup>2</sup> But some say the preliminary effort is the aspiration, and the preliminary conduct either the practice of giving, etc., or solitary wandering by way of bodily seclusion. The “preaching of the Dhamma” is talk which establishes and matures beings in the three types of enlightenment<sup>1</sup> by explaining to them the practice of giving, etc., fewness of wishes, etc., the unsatisfactoriness of Saṃsāra, and the benefit of Nibbāna. “Conduct developing intelligence” is the widening of knowledge by means of the knowledge of the ownership of action (*kammasakatāñña*), the study of blameless occupations and blameless fields of knowledge, the study of the aggregates, bases, etc., and the scrutinization of the three characteristics. In denotation it is the same as the perfection of wisdom, but is mentioned separately in order to show the requisite of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> By mentioning the foundations of mindfulness (and the other thirty-three constituents of enlightenment), he shows the way of arrival that has been brought to its climax, [for those states can be understood as the constituents of the supramundane paths and fruits]. Or the foundations of mindfulness, etc. can be considered only as the accompaniments of insight [by taking them

1. The five mundane *abhiññas* are: the modes of psychic power, the divine eye, the divine ear, the power of reading the minds of others, and the recollection of past lives. The sixth, supramundane *abhiññā*, the knowledge of the destruction of the cankers, is not mentioned here, for that is only attained with the achievement of enlightenment.

2. The *Cariyāpiṭaka* is a late text of the Khuddaka Nikāya dealing with the practice of the *pāramīs*. The “etc.” after “giving” implies the other nine *pāramīs*.

1. *Bodhittaya*: the enlightenment of a disciple, of a paccekabuddha, and of a sammāsambuddha. It should be mentioned that in the Pāli tradition this triad of enlightenments, and its corresponding triad of *yānas* or “vehicles,” do not make a distinct appearance until the late commentarial and sub-commentarial stage of literature. They are only adumbrated in the basic commentaries, while in the four Nikāyas they are not even suggested.

2. There are two sets of requisites (*sambhāra*) for enlightenment the requisites of merit and the requisites of knowledge.



as the preliminary (mundane) portion of practice].<sup>3</sup> And here it should be understood that by mentioning the aspiration he shows the beginning of the way of arrival, by mentioning the *pāramīs* he shows the middle, and by mentioning the four foundations of mindfulness, etc. he shows the consummation.

(ii) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he has ‘thus gone’?

Because as soon as he was born, he went in the same way that the Exalted Vipassī. . . Kassapa went as soon as they were born. And how did the Exalted One go? As soon as he was born he stood with his feet planted evenly on the ground, and then, facing north, went (*gata*) forward with a stride of seven steps. As it is said: ‘As soon as the bodhisatta was born, Ānanda, he stood with his feet planted evenly on the ground; then, while a white parasol was held over him, facing north, he went forward with a stride of seven steps. Having surveyed all the directions, he then uttered the roar of the Leader of the Herd: ‘I am the foremost in the world. I am pre-eminent in the world. I am supreme in the world. This is my last birth. There is now no renewal of existence.’ (D. 14).

His way of going was real (*tatham*), not unreal (*avitatham*), for it foretold his numerous achievements of spiritual distinction, as follows. When, as soon as he was born, he stood with his feet (*pāda*) planted evenly on the ground, that was the foretoken of his obtaining the four bases of spiritual success (*iddhipāda*). When he walked facing north (*uttara*), that was the foretoken of his supremacy in all the world (*sabbalokuttara-bhāva*).<sup>1</sup> His stride of seven steps foretold his obtaining the gems of the seven factors of enlightenment; the golden-staffed chowries that appeared, his defeat of all the sectarian teachers; the white parasol, his obtaining the stainless white parasol of the supreme deliverance of Arahatsip. When he stood surveying all the directions after completing the seventh step, that foretold his obtaining the unobstructed knowledge of omniscience. And his uttering the roar of the Leader of the Herd was the foretoken of his setting in motion the supreme, irreversible Wheel of the Dhamma.

3. The thirty-seven constituents of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyadhammā*) are developed in two distinct stages. The first, the preliminary portion, consists in their development at the time of practising insight (*vipassanā*) on the five aggregates as impermanent, suffering, and not-self. This portion is mundane since its object, the aggregates of the psycho-physical organism, is mundane. The second portion of development consists in their maturation in the four supramundane paths. Here the factors come to prominence as components of these momentary, climactic acts of path-consciousness which realize Nibbāna and break the fetters of the round. On these occasions, and in the subsequent fruits, they are supramundane, since their object, Nibbāna, is a supramundane *dhamma*.

1. N. Sub. Cy. ‘Either his supremacy within all the world, or his transcendence over the entire world.’

Just as the previous Exalted Ones went thus, exactly *thus* did the present Exalted One go (*tathā ayaṃ Bhagavā pi gato*). And his way of going was real, not unreal, for it foretold the above achievements of spiritual distinction. Thence the ancients have said:

The very moment the master bull was born  
He stood upon the earth with even feet.  
Beneath the parasol the Maruts held,  
Gotama took a stride of seven steps.  
When he finished taking seven steps,  
He surveyed all directions with his gaze,  
And like a lion poised on a mountain top,  
Uttered his roar complete in factors eight.

Thence he is the Tathāgata because he has ‘thus gone’.

Or alternatively, as the Exalted Vipassī. . . Kassapa went, exactly *thus* did the present Exalted One go. That is, abandoning sensual desire by renunciation, ill-will by benevolence, sloth-and-torpor by the perception of light, restlessness-and-remorse by non-distraction, and perplexity by the defining of *dhammas*; shattering ignorance with knowledge, dispelling discontent with joy; (1) knocking away the panel of the (five) hindrances with the first *jhāna*, (2) making applied and sustained thought subside with the second *jhāna*, (3) making rapture fade away with the third *jhāna*, and (4) abandoning pleasure and pain with the fourth *jhāna*, (5) surmounting perceptions of material forms, impingement, and diversity with the attainment of the base of infinite space, (6) the perception of the base of infinite space with the attainment of the base of infinite consciousness, (7) the perception of the base of infinite consciousness with the attainment of the base of nothingness, and (8) the perception of the base of nothingness with the attainment of the base of neither perception nor non-perception.<sup>1</sup>

Then he went abandoning (1) the perception of permanence with the contemplation of impermanence, (2) the perception of pleasure with the contemplation of suffering, (3) the perception of self with the contemplation of non-self, (4) delight with the contemplation of disenchantment, (5) lust with the contemplation of fading away, (6) origination with the contemplation of cessation, (7) grasping with the contemplation of relinquishment, (8) the perception of compactness with the contemplation of destruction, (9) accumulation with the contemplation of fall, (10) the perception of stability with the contemplation of change, (11) the

1. These are the eight attainments (*aṭṭha samāpattiyo*) of serenity meditation, four pertaining to the fine material plane and four to the immaterial plane.



sign with the contemplation of the signless, (12) wish with the contemplation of the wishless, (13) adherence with the contemplation of emptiness, (14) adherence due to grasping at substance with the higher wisdom of insight into *dharmas*, (15) adherence due to confusion with the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, (16) the adherence due to reliance with the contemplation of danger, (17) non-reflection with the contemplation of reflection, and (18) adherence due to bondage with the contemplation of the round's end.<sup>2</sup>

Then he went demolishing the defilements co-existing with wrong view with the path of Stream-entry, abandoning the gross defilements (of lust, hate, and delusion) with the path of the Once-returner, extirpating the defilements accompanied by subtle (sensual lust and ill-will) with the path of the Non-returner, and eradicating all defilements with the path of Arahantship.<sup>3</sup> Thence he is the Tathāgata because he has "thus gone."

*Sub. Cy.* In the first case, the participle "gone" (*gata*) in the word "Tathāgata" is explained in the sense of bodily movement. In the second case it is explained in the sense of the movement of knowledge. Here he first shows the Exalted One's state of Tathāgatahood [distinguished by its movement of knowledge] by way of the preliminary practice for the first *jhāna*, stated as the abandoning of the five hindrances, sensual desire and the rest: next by the eight meditative attainments (*aṭṭha samāpatti*) together with their means; and then by the eighteen principal insights (*mahāvīpassanā*). Since the perception of impermanence and the rest come to perfection for one established in the full understanding of the known, which drives away the delusion obstructing the discernment of mentality-materiality and the overcoming of doubt, the "shattering of ignorance" is the means for insight. So too, since the *jhānas*, etc. are easily achieved when discontent is dispelled by joy based on delight in the attainments, the dispelling of discontent is the means for the meditative attainments.

The "contemplation of impermanence" is a name for the insight apprehending the impermanence of the *dharmas* pertaining to the three planes. The "perception of permanence" is the wrong perception of conditioned *dharmas* as permanent or eternal. Under the heading of perception, (wrong) views and (wrong) cognition should also be included.

2. These are the eighteen principal insights (*mahā-vīpassanā*), shown in contrast to the deluded perceptions and defilements they eliminate.

3. It is of interest to note that according to the commentary here, the Buddha, on the night of his enlightenment, must pass through all the four paths crossed by his disciples—the paths of Stream-Entrance, Once-Returner, Non-Returner, and Arahantship. These paths are thus not a particularity of the disciples' course, but a necessity for all who attain liberation from the round, since it is the wisdom in these four path attainments that cuts off the binding defilements.

The same method applies to the cases that follow. The "contemplation of disenchantment" is the contemplation that occurs in the mode of becoming disenchanted with formations. "Delight" is craving accompanied by rapture. The "contemplation of fading away" is contemplation that occurs in the mode of fading away. "Contemplation of cessation" is either the contemplation of the cessation of formations, or the contemplation that "formations cease only, and do not arise again by way of a future re-origination"; thence it is said, "by the contemplation of cessation he makes (formations) cease and does not originate them." This is powerful desire for liberation. The "contemplation of relinquishment" is contemplation that occurs in the mode of relinquishing; [this is the establishing of reflection]. "Grasping" is the apprehension (of formations) as permanent, etc. The "perception of compactness" is the apprehension of identity (in a complex of factors) because of continuity, aggregation, (sameness of) function, or (sameness of) object. "Accumulation" is the forming (of *kamma*). "Change" is the attainment of distinct stages. The "perception of stability" is the apprehension of lastingness. The "sign" is the apprehension of formations as graspable entities, due to the compactness of their aggregation, etc., and to the delimitation of their individual functions. "Wish" is the wishing of lust, etc.; in denotation, it is the inclination towards formations because of craving. "Adherence" is the settled view of a self. "Higher wisdom of insight into *dharmas*" is the scrutinization of all *dharmas* as impermanent, suffering, etc. "Adherence due to grasping at substance" is the perversion of apprehending a substance in the insubstantial. "Adherence due to confusion" is the adherence (to the view that) the world originated through the creative play of God, etc. "Adherence due to reliance" is the apprehension of formations as a shelter and a haven; the reliance is craving. The "contemplation of reflection" is the knowledge that "formations of such and such a kind are being relinquished." The "ending of the round" is Nibbāna, the departure from the round. The "contemplation of the ending of the round" is "change-of-lineage" (*gotrabhū*), the contemplation which occurs taking Nibbāna as its object.<sup>1</sup> The "adherence due to bondage" is the adherence to formations due to being bound.

(iii) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he has come to the real characteristics (of *dharmas*)?

(The six elements:) The earth element has the characteristic of hardness—that is real, not unreal (*tatham avitatham*). The water element, of

1. See *Visuddhimagga*, XXII. 1—14. Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, trans. *The Path of Purification*, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975), pp. 785—788.



flowing; the fire element, of heat; the wind element, of distending; the space element, of intangibility; the consciousness element, of cognizing.

(The five aggregates:) Material form has the characteristic of deformation; feeling, of being felt; perception, of perceiving; the mental formations, of forming; consciousness, of cognizing.

(The *jhāna* factors:) Applied thought has the characteristic of application of mind; sustained thought, of continued pressure; rapture, of pervading; happiness, of gratification; one-pointedness of mind, of non-distraction; contact, of touching.<sup>1</sup>

(The five faculties:) The faculty of faith has the characteristic of resolution; the faculty of energy, of exertion; the faculty of mindfulness, of awareness; the faculty of concentration, of non-distraction; the faculty of wisdom, of understanding.

(The five powers:) The power of faith has the characteristic of not wavering because of faithlessness; the power of energy, of not wavering because of laziness; the power of mindfulness, of not wavering because of forgetfulness; the power of concentration, of not wavering because of restlessness; the power of wisdom, of not wavering because of ignorance.

(The seven factors of enlightenment:) The enlightenment factor of mindfulness has the characteristic of awareness; the factor of investigation of *dharmas*, of investigating; the factor of energy, of exertion; the factor of rapture, of pervading; the factor of tranquillity, of subsiding; the factor of concentration, of non-distraction; the factor of equanimity, of detached observation.

(The eight factors of the noble path:) Right View has the characteristic of seeing; Right Intention, of application of mind; Right Speech, of embracing; Right Action, of originating; Right Livelihood, of cleansing; Right Effort, of exertion; Right Mindfulness, of awareness; Right Concentration, of non-distraction.

(The twelve factors of Dependent Origination:) Ignorance has the characteristic of unknowing; *kamma*-formations, of volition; consciousness, of cognizing; mentality, of inclining, and materiality, of deformation; the six sense-bases, of actuating; contact, of touching; feeling, of being felt; craving, of causing; clinging, of holding; existence, of accumulating; birth, of production; aging, of decaying, and death, of passing away.

The elements have the characteristic of emptiness; the sense-bases, of actuating; the foundations of mindfulness, of awareness; the right endeavours, of endeavouring; the bases of spiritual success, of succeeding;

1. Contact (*phassa*), though included in the *jhānic* consciousness, is not a specific *jhāna* factor, but is included with the *jhāna* factors perhaps for the sake of convenience.

the faculties, of predominance; the powers, of unwavering; the enlightenment factors, of emancipating; the path, of being a cause.

The truths have the characteristic of reality; serenity, of non-distraction; insight, of contemplation; serenity and insight, of having a single flavour; the pairs of complementary opposites,<sup>1</sup> of not exceeding one another.

The purification of virtue has the characteristic of restraint; purification of mind, of non-distraction; purification of view, of seeing.

The knowledge of destruction has the characteristic of eradication; the knowledge of non-arising has the characteristic of tranquillity.<sup>2</sup>

Desire has the characteristic of being the root; attention, of being the originator; contact, of collecting together; feeling, of convergence; concentration, of eminence; mindfulness, of predominance; wisdom, of supremacy; deliverance, of being the essence; and Nibbāna, the plunge into the deathless, of being the consummation.

All these characteristics are real, not unreal. Through the movement of his faculty of knowledge he has come to the real characteristic (of all *dharmas*); he has reached it without falling away from it, fully arrived at it—therefore he is the Tathāgata.

Thence he is the Tathāgata because he has come to the real characteristic.

(iv) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he awakened to real *dharmas* in accordance with actuality?

It is the Four Noble Truths that are called “real *dharmas*”. As it is said: “These Four Noble Truths, bhikkhus, are real, not unreal, not otherwise (*tathāni avitathāni anaññathāni*). What four? ‘This is suffering’, bhikkhus—this is real, not unreal, not otherwise,” and so on, in detail (S. V. xii. *Sacca Saṃyutta*, 2.10). The Exalted One awakened to those truths. Therefore, because he awakened to real *dharmas*, he is called the Tathāgata; for here the word “gone” has the meaning “awakened” (*abhisambuddhattha*).

Further, the fact that aging and death originate and commence with birth as condition is real, not unreal, not otherwise. (And so forth, until:) The fact that the *kamma*-formations originate and commence with ignorance as condition is real, not unreal, not otherwise. The fact that ignorance is the condition for the *kamma*-formations, the *kamma*-formations for consciousness, . . . birth for aging and death, is real, not unreal, not otherwise. All that the Exalted One awakened to. Because he awakened to real *dharmas*, he is called the Tathāgata.

1. Sub. Cy. “Serenity and insight. Some say faith and wisdom, and exertion and non-distraction.”

2. Sub. Cy. “‘Destruction’ is the path, for it destroys the defilements; ‘non-arising’ is the fruit, for it is the conclusion with no further arising.”



Thence he is the Tathāgata because he awakened to real *dharmas* in accordance with actuality.

*Sub. Cy.* The four truths are “real” because their specific nature is undistorted (*aviparītasabhāvatā*), “not unreal” because their specific nature is not false (*amūṣāsabhāvatā*), “not otherwise” because they do not admit of any alteration (*aññākārahitattā*).

*N. Sub. Cy.* Having first shown the fourth reason by way of the truths, he next shows it by way of the factors of Dependent Origination functioning as conditions and conditionally arisen phenomena, which are “real” because of the non-distortion of their specific nature. “Awakened” is said because the root “go” (*gamu*) has the meaning of understanding (*buddhi*).<sup>1</sup>

(v) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he is a seer of the real?

In this world together with its gods, etc., in this generation with its rulers and its men, whatever visual-form object there is that enters the threshold of the eye-door of the innumerable beings throughout the innumerable world-systems—that the Exalted One knows and sees in all its modes. And knowing and seeing it thus, he has analysed it under numerous names, in thirteen sections, and by fifty-two methods, as desirable or undesirable etc., and as found under the applicable term among the seen, heard, sensed and cognized, according to the method given thus: “What is the material form that is the visual-form base? The material form derivative upon the four primary elements that is of coloured appearance, visible, impinging, blue, yellow,” etc. (*Dhammasaṅgaṇī* 616 (*Rūpa-kaṇḍa*). This is real, not unreal. The same method in regard to sounds entering the threshold of the ear-door (and the other sense-objects in their respective sense-doors). For the Exalted One has said: “In this world, bhikkhus, together with its gods, etc., in this generation with its rulers and its men, whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, reached, sought after, or examined by the mind—that I know. That I have directly known. That the Tathāgata has understood. But the Tathāgata does not take a stand upon it” (A. *Catukka-Nipāta*, i. 3. 4, *Kālakārāma Sutta*). Thence he is the Tathāgata because he is a seer of the real. Here the term “Tathāgata” should be understood to mean a seer of the real.

*Sub. Cy.* “Under numerous names”: the visual-form object is described as desirable, undesirable, neutral, inferior, past, future, present, internal, external, seen, cognized, visual-form, visual-form base, visual-form element, a coloured appearance, visible, impinging, blue, yellow, etc. “In thirteen sections”: this is said in reference to the thirteen expository

1. On this interchangeability of words signifying movement and knowledge see above, p. 70.

sections which have come down in the chapter on material form (in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*). “By fifty-two methods”: this is said in reference to the four methods of defining contained in each of the thirteen sections.<sup>1</sup> “This is real”: because of the undistortedness of his vision and the incontrovertible character of his teaching. The analytical derivation of the word “Tathāgata” should be understood thus: he goes to (*gacchati*)—i.e. he sees and knows—these *dharmas* beginning with the visual-form object, in the very way (*tathā*) they exist in their specific nature and mode.

(vi) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he is a speaker of the real?

In the forty-five year interval between the night when the Exalted One, sitting in the invincible posture on the terrace of enlightenment, crushed the heads of the three Māras<sup>2</sup> and awakened to the supreme perfect enlightenment, and the night when he attained final Nibbāna in the Nibbāna-element without residue while lying between the twin Sāl trees, whatever the Exalted One spoke whether in the first, middle, or final periods following the enlightenment—the discourses, songs, expositions, stanzas, joyous exclamations, sayings, birth-stories, wonders, and miscellanies<sup>1</sup>—all this is irreproachable in meaning and in phrasing, free from excess and deficiency, perfect in all its modes, crushing the vanity of lust, hatred, and delusion. There is not even as much as a hair’s tip in this that is defective. It all appears as though it had been stamped with a single seal, measured with a single ruler, or weighed upon a single pair of scales. It is all real, not unreal, not otherwise. As it is said: “Between the night when the Tathāgata awakens to the supreme perfect enlightenment and the night when he attains final Nibbāna in the Nibbāna element without residue, whatever he speaks, utters, or expounds—all that is real, not otherwise. Therefore he is called the Tathāgata” (A. *Catukka-Nipāta*, i. 3.3, *Loka Sutta*). For here the word *gata* has the meaning of enunciation (*gata*).

Thence he is the Tathāgata because he is a speaker of the real.

Further, the word *āgata* or *āgadana* means pronouncement; that is, a statement (*vacana*). His pronouncement is real and undistorted: Thus, changing the letter ‘d’ to a ‘t’, the derivation of the word “Tathāgata” may be understood in this sense.

(vii) Why is he called the Tathāgata because he practises what he teaches?

1. The thirteen sections are expounded according to the various mental factors, such as feeling, contact, consciousness, etc., which originate with each sense-quality as their objective basis. The four methods obtain from the differentiation of the cognitive act into past, present, future, and future possibility.

2. The “three Māras” are the defilements, *kamma*-formations, and the malign deity. The Māras of the aggregates and of death are defeated with the attainment of final Nibbāna.

1. This is the traditional ninefold classification of the Word of the Buddha.



The bodily action of the Exalted One conforms to his speech, and his speech conforms to his bodily action; therefore he is one who practises what he teaches and teaches what he practises. Since he is of such a nature, his bodily action has "gone thus" (*tathā gata*), proceeding in accordance with his speech, and his speech has "gone thus," proceeding in accordance with his bodily action; thus he is the Tathāgata. As it is said: "As the Tathāgata says, so he does; as he does, so he says. Therefore he is called the Tathāgata." (*Ibid*).

Thence he is the Tathāgata because he practises what he teaches.

(viii) Why is he called the Tathāgata in the sense of vanquishing or surpassing (*abhibhavana*)?

From the pinnacle of existence<sup>1</sup> downwards, and from the Avīci hell upwards, throughout the innumerable world-systems, the Tathāgata surpasses (*abhibhavati*) all beings in regard to virtue, concentration, wisdom, deliverance, and knowledge-and-vision of deliverance. There is none his equal or measure. He is unequalled, immeasurable, incomparable—the king of kings, the god of gods, the Sakka above all Sakkas, the Brahmā above all Brahmās. Thus it is said: "In this world, bhikkhus, together with its gods, etc., in this generation with its rulers and its men, the Tathāgata is the vanquisher, the unvanquished, the universal seer, the wielder of power. Therefore he is called the Tathāgata." (*Ibid*).

Here the word-derivation should be understood as follows: *Agada* is, as it were, a kind of medicine. What kind? His elegance of teaching and his accumulation of merit. For by means of these, he vanquishes all the rival teachers as well as this world together with its gods in the same way a powerful physician vanquishes snakes with a divine medicine. Thus his medicine (*agada*) for vanquishing all the world is his real, undistorted elegance of teaching and his accumulation of merit. Changing the letter 'd' to a 't', the derivation of the word "Tathāgata" may be understood thus: he is the Tathāgata in the sense of vanquishing.

Furthermore,<sup>2</sup> he is the Tathāgata because he has "gone through reality" (*tathāya gato*) and because he has "really gone" (*tatham gato*). Here "gone" (*gata*) has the meanings of undergone (*avagata*), gone beyond (*atīta*), attained (*patta*), and practised (*paṭipanna*). Thus he is the Tathāgata because he has gone through—i.e. undergone—reality

1. *Bhavagga*: the base of neither perception nor non-perception, the highest plane of phenomenal existence, the ontological equivalent and kammic consequence of the fourth immaterial meditative attainment.

2. This derivation, though perhaps the deepest and most suggestive of all those given, is not separately enumerated in the text.

by fully understanding the entire world<sup>3</sup>, through the scrutinization (of its essential characteristics, as impermanent, suffering and not-self). He is the Tathāgata because he has gone through—i.e. gone beyond—reality by fully understanding the world through the abandonment of its origin. He is the Tathāgata because he has gone through—i.e. attained—reality by realizing the cessation of the world. And he is the Tathāgata because he has really gone along—i.e. practised—the way leading to the cessation of the world. Thence the Exalted One has said: "The world, bhikkhus, has been awakened to by the Tathāgata; the Tathāgata is detached from the world. The origin of the world has been awakened to by the Tathāgata; the Tathāgata has abandoned the origin of the world. The cessation of the world has been awakened to by the Tathāgata; the Tathāgata has realized the cessation of the world. The way leading to the cessation of the world has been awakened to by the Tathāgata; the Tathāgata has developed the way leading to the cessation of the world. Whatever there is in this world together with its gods, etc.—all that has been awakened to by the Tathāgata. Therefore he is called the Tathāgata." (*Ibid*).

The meaning of the word "Tathāgata" should be understood as given. But this is the mere introduction to the explanation of the nature of a Tathāgata. For only a Tathāgata himself can explain the nature of a Tathāgata in its completeness.

*Sub. Cy.* Why is this the mere introduction? Because the word "Tathāgata" like the word "diligence" (*appamāda*, referring to the Buddha's last words), contains the entire practice of the Dhamma as well as all the qualities of a Buddha.

3. *N. Sub. Cy.* "The 'world' here is the noble truth of suffering." The following items should likewise be connected with the remaining three noble truths, in their respective sequence.

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